

RATIONALE FOR THE DELIVERY OF PUBLIC LEISURE SERVICES POLICY
Council Policy No. 118/12

BACKGROUND:

The overall principles established for the delivery of municipal leisure services may differ from community to community and may alter through time. There is neither a right goal nor a wrong one. However, the overall goals must be agreed to and supported by the Municipal Council and reflect the interests of the entire community. They must also be consistent with the accepted philosophical foundation. Council support must be clear and total, because in some cases (although hopefully only in isolated cases), achieving the social goals may not entirely parallel the meeting of short term public demand. If a Council bows to public demand by always giving vocal minority groups what they want, simply because they say they want it, then Council will not be protecting the overall public interest. It will, instead, be taxing all citizens to subsidize the interests of a few, simply because those few want help to finance their recreation pursuits.

The City of Fort St John's Council and staff works to responsibly manage its recreational spaces in an equitable manner to meet current and future demands for both organized and casual participants. In doing so, it is important to consider the needs of diverse populations, groups, and individuals while recognizing the tax-based contribution provided by residents toward the development and operation of community recreation assets.

Throughout 2011, the City undertook a comprehensive review of our overall approach to the provision of leisure services and the user fees attached. Recognizing many of our existing policies and fees did not have a common rational or philosophical base, the City critically examined all aspects of our leisure operations. As a result, staff and Council developed a commitment to a 'Benefits Based Approach' to the delivery of publicly provided leisure services in Fort St John. This policy reflects that commitment, identifying the rationale to which Fort St John will continue to work to manage leisure pursuits.

1. **GOALS:**

The two goals for the delivery of public leisure services in Fort St John are:

GOAL #1 – To use the delivery of public leisure services to further the growth and development of the individual socially, emotionally, morally, academically and through physical growth of each member of the community.

GOAL #2 – To use the delivery of public leisure services to further the growth and development of the community by:

1. establishing a broadly felt community identity – over time, people will begin to feel a part of the community in which they reside
2. developing a widely held community spirit - people not only feel a part of the community, but they feel good about it
3. recognition of the evolution of our community culture – becoming known for our unique characteristics and attributes

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2. OBJECTIVES:

The City of Fort St John has determined that the following 21 Objectives can be considered to be specific public leisure service categories for achieving the above identified Goals. As a result, all public leisure services activities directed toward achieving the two goals should be able to be categorized under one or more of these objectives:

Summary of Fort St John’s Goals and 21 Objectives

Goal #1: Growth of Individual	Goal #2: Growth of Community
Fitness and Well Being	Special Events
Preschool Recreation Opportunities	Support for Local Community Groups
Basic Skills for School Aged Children	Spectator Sport
Advanced Skills for School Aged Children	Exposure to the Arts
Social Opportunities for Teens	Social Functions
Basic Skills for Adults	Protecting Natural Resources
Advanced Skills for Adults	Beautify the Community
Recreation Opportunities for Seniors	Opportunities for Family Units
Interpreting the Environment	Mixing Generations and Subgroups
Reflection/Escape	
Leisure Education	
Communication System	

Until a more sophisticated way of gauging “public good” is identified, this list of 2 socially worthwhile goals and 21 objectives will be used as indicators of public benefit in Fort St John. Detailed explanations of the above Objectives can be found in Appendix A.

The rationale as outlined above does not determine how much money a Municipal Council allocates to the delivery of public leisure services. Instead, it provides a framework within which to make decisions no matter what level of service is supported by Council.

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3. THE BENEFITS BASED APPROACH: (continued)

There is no easy quantitative formula for determining the amount of public benefit that flows from a particular good or service. It is a matter of local judgment and will typically reflect community values.

	Thresholds of Cost Recovery				
	0%	25%	50%	75%	100%
	Public		Merit		Private
Type of Gov't Activity	Public Goods & Services	Merit Goods & Services with relatively high community benefit	Merit Goods & Services with a relatively equal mix of community and private benefit	Merit Goods & Services with relatively high private benefit	Private Goods & Services
Pricing Strategy	No price charged	25% cost recovery	50% cost recovery	75% cost recovery	At a minimum, full cost recovery
Cost Recovery Benchmark	None	25% of all costs (sunk and variable)	50% of all costs (sunk and variable)	75% of all costs (sunk and variable)	At a minimum, 100% of all costs (sunk and variable)
Rationale	Goods and services which support community goals and result in a very high degree of community benefit are worthy of provision on a fully subsidized basis. The costs of these goods and services should not be paid for by users	The more a good or service supports community goals and results in community benefits, the more worthy of public support, and the less the user should be required to pay	Where the benefits to the community and to users are approximately equal, the costs should be shared equally	The more the benefits of a good or service accrue to the consumer of the good or service, and not to the wider community, the more the user should be required to pay	Where the benefits of a good or service accrue solely to the consumer of the good or service, with no benefit to the wider community, the user should be required to pay full costs Generating surplus revenue can be justified provided that it is a by-product of the fulfillment of a community goal, and not to the goal itself

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3. THE BENEFITS BASED APPROACH: (continued)

Fort St John's assessment of the overall public benefit and resulting recovery rates for all public leisure services have been determined and included in a bylaw in 2012 utilizing the Benefits Based Approach. In general, where a lower recovery rate is identified, it is because there will be more public benefit delivered under the 21 Objective headings.

4. FORT ST JOHN'S FEES AND CHARGES MODEL:

The fundamental basis for fees and charges decision-making is a determination of who benefits from the service as outlined in the above Benefits Based Approach and Fee Subsidy models. However, it is recognized that pricing decisions may be influenced by practical considerations such as collection costs, market effects, legal constraints, or ability to pay.

Therefore, the approach to fees and charges decision-making as set out in this policy can be regarded as "two-pronged". Decisions should be based first and foremost on an assessment of where the benefits of provision accrue. The benefits analysis is the first "prong" of the two-pronged approach and ensures that fees and charges decisions are rooted in a philosophical base. The second "prong" allows for the influence of other charging considerations for practical reasons. It ensures the philosophical base can be implemented.

Some of the factors which modify and limit the generality of the Rationale and make it more practical without sacrificing its philosophical integrity are listed below:

1. The revenue collected from fees or charges must always be greater than the costs of collection of the revenue. If not, the revenue should not be collected.
2. It may be desirable to use the charging mechanism to discourage or encourage particular behaviour (e.g. alter demand patterns, discourage unreasonable uses of staff time, discourage polluting behaviour, etc.).
3. Using public sector funds with the objective of undermining the ability of the private sector to compete in the market place is unacceptable. Taxes should never be used to compete unfairly with the private sector. However, if the public good needs to be realized, and if the private sector is unwilling or unable to realize it at a price that is affordable by the target market, the public sector can justify competing with the private sector to realize those public benefits.
4. The precondition for being able to levy a fee or charge is that the good or service exhibit both "benefit separability" and "exclusion". These characters are:
 - "benefit separability" - that is, it must be possible to identify a person(s), group, organization that directly benefits from provision of the service,
 - and chargeability" or "exclusion" - that is, it must be possible to exclude individuals from receiving the benefit of the good or service if they do not pay.

These are both absent in the case of pure public services.

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4. FORT ST JOHN'S FEES AND CHARGES MODEL: (continued)
5. The use of public recreation areas and facilities by private groups should be considered secondary to general public usage or use by non-profit recreation or service organizations. Only under unusual circumstances should such private use hamper the ongoing City sponsored programs, drop-in opportunities and recreation rentals. One unusual circumstance is when excess capacity exists in a space once the public good has been met.
6. The community has a right to profit on the use of its facilities when public resources are utilized by profit-motivated individuals, groups or companies.
7. No Fort St. John resident should be refused admission or registration for any recreation activity due to the inability to pay a fee or charge. Like education, health or safety, recreation is a basic human need and should be available to all.
8. Damage deposits will be required in advance of booking one-time events by all but established organizations or regular users. A warning letter will be sent on the "first offence" of a group or individual having to forfeit the damage deposit, advising that should such an occurrence be repeated, privileges of using the facilities will be suspended.
9. Rental cancellations must be made two weeks in advance of the event, or else 100% of the rental will be charged, unless otherwise included in other policies.
10. Where additional staff time or other resources are required in order to support a specific facility rental, beyond the regularly scheduled amount of staff time or other resource that is typically included in that base rental cost, those additional costs will be passed on to the user in addition to the regular hourly rental rate. So, all set up fees, all extra cleaning fees, all specialized services (e.g. AV services, or food and beverage services) and all security fees would be charged extra, at cost. This will specifically, but not exclusively, relate to all arena uses at which admission is charged.
11. The public will be informed well in advance of changes to fees and charges to permit advance planning by groups who may have to adjust registration fees and fund-raising activities to accommodate the new rates.
12. A rental fee will be charged for the use of such equipment and supplies as may be deemed rentable. Commodities shall include any item that would enhance our City's ability to give high quality public service.
13. In cases where demand is high for a facility during a limited time period and there is an economic reason to attempt to shift some of that demand to an otherwise low demand period, discount pricing may be used to provide the incentive to shift demand to the lower use period. This is the only reason that prices should vary with time. (ie: prime time vs non-prime time) Initially, prime time will only be applied to use of arenas while the ice is in. Other spaces may be added in the future as needed to "shed load" to less attractive periods.
14. Leases of city owned space will be negotiated separately, but according to the principles of the benefits based approach.

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APPENDIX A – Overview of 21 Socially Worthwhile Objectives

The following 21 Service Objectives are consistent with the two Growth Goals described in Section 2.

Goal #1 - Individual Growth

FITNESS (WELL BEING)

Fitness, in this context, is used broadly as a synonym for wellness, and refers to mental and emotional, as well as physical fitness. The fitness level of every resident of the community should be increased at least to a pre-determined minimum level with opportunities available for progress beyond this point.

PRE-SCHOOL LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

An opportunity should exist for every pre-school aged child to participate with other children in a variety of leisure experiences, in order to:

- Expose the child to social settings
- Foster gross motor development
- Provide a generally happy and satisfying atmosphere where growth can occur
- Teach basic safety skills and attitudes.

BASIC LEISURE SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

A wide variety of leisure pursuits in such areas as sport, performing arts, visual arts, outdoor nature oriented skills, and hobbies, should be identified, and basic skill level instruction in each should be provided for school aged children in order to:

- Provide exposure to skills which may form the basis for enjoying lifetime leisure activities
- Contribute to gross motor and fine motor physical development
- Provide social settings in which social, moral and emotional growth can be fostered
- Provide the basis for leisure education (i.e. the teachings of the benefits of and wise use of leisure time).

ADVANCED LEISURE SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

Opportunities should be provided for those children who wish to further develop their interest and skills in a wide variety of leisure pursuits beyond the basic level.

SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEENS

The maturing from youth to adult which occurs during teenage years is often a critical time in the life of an individual. It is also a time when individual difficulties may result in severe social problems. Hence, opportunities should be provided for teens to:

- Learn about themselves and how they will react to various social settings and pressures
- Develop positive social/emotional/moral skills, principles and convictions
- Develop positive leisure lifestyle patterns which will remain with them through adulthood.

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Goal #1 - Individual Growth (continued)

BASIC LEISURE SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR ADULTS

Opportunities should be provided in a wide range of leisure endeavors and hobbies for adults who wish to be exposed to such endeavors and learn some basic skills in each.

ADVANCED LEISURE SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR ADULTS

Opportunities should be provided for those adults who wish to further develop their interests or abilities in a wide variety of leisure pursuits.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SENIORS

Opportunities should be provided for senior citizens to participate in the leisure activities of their choice in order to:

- Maintain overall fitness levels
- Maintain social contacts and continue to be involved in social environments
- Provide a continuing sense of worth and meaning of life through continuing personal growth.

INTERPRETING THE ENVIRONMENT

Opportunities should be provided for every local resident to learn about, understand, relate to and experience all aspects of his/her environment.

REFLECTION/ESCAPE

Often growth can occur through escape, reflection, contact with nature and relaxation in a serene natural environment. Because of this, opportunities should be provided for residents to experience nature.

LEISURE EDUCATION

All residents should be generally educated as to the best use of leisure time and the benefits (e.g. growth and fulfillment) that accrue therefrom.

COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

A communication/information system should be established and maintained whereby all residents are made aware of the availability of access to all leisure opportunities in the community.

Goal #2 - Community Growth

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events (e.g. carnivals, fairs, and the likes) can contribute to a feeling of community identity and spirit. Therefore, the municipality should be involved in sponsoring special events to the extent necessary to ensure promotion of this objective.

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Goal #2 - Community Growth (continued)

SUPPORT TO LOCAL GROUPS

Local clubs, groups and agencies are and will be organizing and sponsoring leisure opportunities. The "people doing things for themselves" aspect of such groups is socially worthwhile and desirable. The municipality should support such groups in their efforts. Support may occur in a number of ways, including subsidized access to facilities, assistance in leadership training, provision of specialized equipment or the provision of operating grants.

EXPOSURE TO SPORTING EVENTS

Community identity, spirit and culture can be fostered through the environment generated by spectators at athletic events. In such events, sport can be closely linked with community identity and pride. Because of this, opportunities should be provided for spectator experiences at athletic events.

EXPOSURE TO THE ARTS

Artistic endeavors (both performing and visual) represent one of the most significant aspects of developing a culture in any community. Through exposure to the arts, local residents should develop a better understanding and appreciation of the cultural aspects of a community.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Because social functions are a valuable vehicle to use in developing community cohesion and identity, the public sector should ensure that such opportunities exist.

PROTECTING COMMUNITY NATURAL RESOURCES

The protection of natural aesthetic features, vistas, natural phenomenon and features of historic significance and the provision of public access to such features will contribute to a greater understanding of and pride in the community and, therefore, contribute to community growth.

BEAUTIFY THE COMMUNITY

The extent to which a community is seen by its residents as being visually pleasing is directly related to the potential for creating community identity, spirit and culture. Therefore, to make a community more beautiful is a worthwhile social objective worthy of tax support.

FAMILY ORIENTED LEISURE SERVICES

The family unit is an integral building block of community growth. Opportunities should be provided for families to pursue leisure as a family unit.

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Goal #2 - Community Growth (continued)

INTEGRATING GENERATIONS AND SUB GROUPS

Community growth can be fostered through increased contact between people of varying age groups within the community. The more contact and interchange between seniors and younger adults and children, the greater the potential for community growth. Therefore, in the provision of leisure services, attempts should be made to provide such contact and interchange between seniors and younger residents with a view toward transmitting cultural heritage across the generations.

Community growth can further be fostered through an integrative mixing of various ethnic groups so that each better understands and appreciates the differences and strengths of the other. Multicultural recreation services can be used as a vehicle in making the community more cohesive.

Community growth can also be fostered by integrating various groups of people with special needs into mainstream programming. Whether individuals have physical, emotional or mental special needs, recreation can be used as a leveling and integrative force.